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THE CHARACTERISTIC FORM ASSUMED BY DREAMS

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It is as rare for a dream of any length to follow a single path or direction as for a train of waking thought to do so. A pulse of attention, fatigue, or a new moment of interest severally enters to shift conscious processes into new channels, and a similar shifting takes place in dreams. In this latter case, however, a study of the explicit phenomena of dreams has shown interesting peculiarities that call for further description. These phenomena appeared, somewhat as by-products, in the investigation of the implicit factors in dreams, conducted through a period of several months.

Attending to dreams aggravates them, fortunately for the experiment if not for the experimenter. The *Aufgabe* appears to exert an influence during sleep-hours, so that by attending for a long period to dreams one comes to be a light sleeper and a prolific dreamer. In time, literally *trains* of dreams come readily to mind and can be for the most part transcribed to paper in considerable detail. It is perhaps only under these conditions, when dream-material is abundant, that the true characteristic or type-form of the dream series appears, and may for this reason have escaped general notice.

Unless the conditions be unusual, as when some fixed idea monopolizes the dream,—a fatigue phenomenon,—or when the duration of the dream be actually brief, a dream is found to be constituted of several *dream-phases*, or *motifs*, distinct one from the other, in visual and other imagery, in characters and in situations, but linked together by some associative nexus, usually of an imaginal, but occasionally of an affective sort. Something from one dream persists into and 'sets off' the succeeding dream-phase. By means of this relational element, antecedent dreams are often recalled at a time considerably subsequent to the recall of the end-dream or dream at the waking moment. Or, again, chains of dreams are pictured at once *in situ* upon awaking. In any case there appear to be characteristic schemata to which the content conforms perforce, and which therefore must be considered

in evaluating even these implicit (Freudian, and other) factors in dreams.

What these schemata are will appear if we take an actual dream-manifold and analyze it. Such an one is the following, taken from notes made at the moment of awaking (abbreviated):—

“ standing on a side-hill with a friend. Note in distance an ENORMOUS AIR-SHIP approaching at FIERCE SPEED. It SHOOTS by overhead, circles, turns over and over gracefully the movements GROW SLOWER and it comes to earth. I make conversation with the pilot and passenger, the latter discussing the fine points of the air-craft with me. By this time the air-ship has become greatly REDUCED IN SIZE to the proportions of an ordinary MONOPLANE the passenger sits in a LITTLE HAMMOCK in the rear near the propeller.”

There is now a shift of scene, with new surroundings, new characters:—

“ Am beside a BROAD lake near a LARGE hotel watching the arrival of guests. In the foreground stand some PAINTERS' LADDERS on a pair of wheels, and I call out: 'Tell the carpenters to come for their ladders'. have a sense of saying something very strategic as though concealing the fact that these were not really ladders but something else (?). Now go down to the water to greet arriving guests. The scenery SHRINKS the guests become REDUCED IN NUMBER to three intimate friends whom I now undertake to introduce one to another some names are forgotten and embarrassment ensues.”

Here, again, occurs a complete shift of scene.

“ Am now in a GREAT FOREST, ENORMOUS TREES, CROWDS of gaily-dressed people, horses, etc. Seem to be directing the presentation of a pageant movement of figures to and fro as I gesture and command. Gradually the figures grow SMALLER, the field as visually imaged is RESTRICTED I now appear to be watching dolls perform on a cardboard stage in some ROOM or other.”

Here is a dream manifold in three distinct parts. As a matter of fact the separate parts were recalled upon waking in reverse order, the last scene in the forest being the first recalled, then the lake-scene, and lastly, while the other two dreams were being put to paper, the first dream of the air-ship

was brought back to mind. In this series of dreams at least four phenomena are significantly illustrated:

(1) A given dream-episode is launched abruptly, "full-blown." At its initiation all the elements of imagery are maximal; things then seem brightest, largest, widest, highest, loudest, quickest, etc. So in the dream appears the 'ENORMOUS AIR-SHIP,' 'FIERCE SPEED,' 'BROAD LAKE,' 'GREAT FOREST,' 'CROWDS OF PEOPLE,' etc., at the *beginning* of the respective episodes.

(2) Upon the appearance of such a congeries, a process of condensation begins at once. Things pale, grow small, are suppressed or disappear altogether, sometimes retaining a kind of form with loss of substance, as it were. Meaning and content are dimmed or changed. So, above, the 'MOVEMENTS GROW SLOWER,' 'AIR-SHIP REDUCED IN SIZE,' 'LITTLE HAMMOCK,' 'SCENERY SHRINKS,' 'GUESTS REDUCED IN NUMBER,' 'FIGURES GROW SMALLER,' 'PEOPLE BECOME DOLLS,' and a 'ROOM' takes the place of outdoors.

(3) As before suggested some one factor in a given episode persists, becoming the nucleus of the succeeding episode. The latter is abruptly initiated and incorporates the nucleus in a new complex. Thus the monoplane of (1) becomes the carpenters' ladders of (2), and the presenting of friends in (2) becomes the directing of a pageant in (3). In no two successive episodes of a dream-series was the second or later episode wholly independent of the episode preceding. However great the apparent gap between the two, some point of community could always be found.

(4) Finally in certain dreams imaginal elements, while still vivid, may play a rôle relatively subordinate to an affective element. In case a strong affective element, *e. g.*, FEAR, is present, a temporal summation of the dream-emotion may occur, persisting through successive episodes to culminate in arousing the sleeper. In such cases the affective element often itself becomes the link of connection between episodes, when perhaps no other traceable element can be found. This is relatively rare however.

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Now is it possible to go beyond the mere description of these phenomena? Can they be explained? One or two suggestions may be adventured:

(1) There appear to be rhythms or phases in the continuous dream analogous to attention waves.

(2) These rhythms differ from the body-rhythms of breathing, heart-beat, etc., in the abruptness with which they are initiated. In this respect they are analogous to a new moment of attention, and suggest an 'explosion' of energy rather than a pendular wave.

(3) A residuum of energy from one phase acts as a stimulus in the release of energy for a succeeding phase.

(4) Finally, each phase may contribute an increment of energy to vaso-motor centres, where it does not find outlet at once but is gradually summated, until there is a sudden awakening, marked by a cry, start, forced breathing, perspiration, or similar physiological accompaniment; these motor phenomena serving as channels of drainage for the sympathetic system.